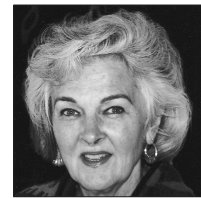


Meredith Sabini

FROM THE LIGHTHOUSE



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Have you ever had a dream that tells you *about* the dreaming mind? I am curious about these and want to begin my new column with this intriguing topic. I refer not to lucid dreams in which we become aware we are dreaming but informative or informational dreams in which we learn something about the process or content of dreaming. I will give several examples and welcome others. This inquiry sets the tone for how I plan to approach the "field of dreams," a play on words that suggests the field of dream studies, the organic medium out of which dreams arise, and the playing field where we engage with them.

We now have many excellent, established theories of dreams and dreaming, many ways of working with and studying them. What if, in addition, we gathered these informational dreams about dreaming and allowed them to inform our theories and ways of working? This methodology treats "The Dreaming" as a

phenomenological Other with which we can establish an active relationship; it is in the tradition of *gnosis*, a mode of knowing from interior sources that is central to all wisdom traditions.

A classmate of mine in graduate school, many years ago, shared what was probably the first dream I encountered in which the psyche referred directly to itself:

*I am falling, falling ...
gently, without fear, and
then land on something soft
yet definite. A voice says,
"This is the unconscious."*

He chuckled as he retold the dream, surprised that the unconscious would portray itself as a locale, would announce its presence as if to say, "Hello. Here I am. Welcome." It's been thirty years since I heard this dream, but I remember it vividly, for it offered some important hints about the nature of the unconscious: that it is located "below" and can be reached if we let ourselves "fall;" that it is a definite place; that it has a voice and can speak for and about itself. How different from prevalent notions about the unconscious as remote, illusory, hidden, obscure, and ephemeral!

Our graduate school was new and experimental at the time, not mainstream, but the curriculum nevertheless led to

a doctorate in clinical psychology; so it made sense that the dreaming mind used a term recognizable and appropriate for that context: "the unconscious." Had the dream taken place in another culture, the voice might have said, "This is the spirit world" or "This is the realm of the Ancestors" or "This is the Void." Known by a variety of terms, this domain is the generative Unknown or Source out of which dreams, and perhaps life's entire unfolding, emerge. The man who had the dream was not particularly in denial about the existence of such a place, so the dream was not compensatory; he was merely a novice, yet to have much experience of it. The dream seemed to initiate contact and offer guidance, using both word and image to describe itself to the dreamer.

Over the years, the dreaming mind has guided and chided me about the use and misuse I make of my own dreams; it has shown me how to do symbol research, explained the shifts in frequency and color in dreams, among other things. When I first began teaching dream seminars in 1976, a dream came that has become a touchstone. The prior evening, I'd been reading a senior author who praised the imaginal range of the dream world for its lack of ordinary reality con-

straints, a *puer* point of view I was willing to adopt at the time. The psyche apparently had concerns about this, for it put in my mouth its own words of wisdom:

I am giving a talk to a gathering of therapists on how to assess clients' dreams and watch for trouble signs. I say to evaluate dreams naturalistically: if there is a fire or flood or other danger, take it as if it were a picture of the client's situation, using common sense as to whether it is natural and ordinary or problematic and dangerous.

I accepted this correction by the dreaming mind about how it wanted *its* dreams interpreted, and have felt well served by this viewpoint ever since.

About a year ago, as I was pondering the potential self-reflective capacity of the dreaming mind, it occurred to me to simply ask if it would tell me about itself. The question seemed so obvious I wondered why I had never considered it before. As I prepared myself to do this meditation, a feeling of humbleness came, as if I were about to approach a wise elder with an important inquiry. I sat quietly for a while, waiting. Then a very specific image appeared in my mind's eye: the lighthouse on Brother's Island

in San Francisco Bay. I was given to understand that the circulating beacon on top was analogous to the dreaming mind, part of which remains awake and alert all the time and performs a scanning function. Dreams per se, I was further given to understand, were like snapshots that occur when the aperture of that lens focuses and closes on a certain scene.

That there is a “light” on within us is recognized by many spiritual traditions; alchemists called it the *lumen naturae*, or light within Nature. Today, it is often known as the light of consciousness, but I feel this term is bandied about so broadly that it has lost useful meaning. By offering this living image of a “house of light,” perhaps the dreaming mind can refresh our understanding. Since a lighthouse is not a personal symbol, I turn to objective amplification.

Lighthouses are typically built on rock foundations near a shoreline and were originally designed to help boats navigate narrow passages or steer clear of shoals. One of the earliest known was constructed in Egypt by Ptolemy II on a small island off Alexandria; it was included among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Smoke by day and the glow of fires by night guided vessels up and down the Nile. The fires were tended by priests. Lighthouses have come to alert air traffic to fog and land outcroppings, now using not only lights but also sirens, whistles, radar, and other radio frequency beacons.

Translating this factual information into psychological terms, we can see the lighthouse as symbolizing the place where the visible and nonvisi-

ble worlds meet; it stands at the juncture of the surface and deep waters below. The position of the dreaming mind at this interstices corresponds to its transcendent capacity to blend the known and unknown into something novel and unexpected. Dreams do not separate past, present, and future; they don’t divide inner and outer, subjective and objective. This is why the symbols from dreams cannot be broken down into an isomor-

phic relationship where this means that. The light they cast is like a hologram, penetrating multiple dimensions simultaneously. In this way, dreams can be as frustrating as snapshots with missing labels; we are in the dark as to what topic they address, what aspect of life they pertain to.

What if we gathered these informational dreams about dreaming and allowed them to inform our theories and ways of working?

Lighthouses are not intended to serve single individuals; they serve the general-ity. The lighthouse that appeared in my vision was specifically “Brother’s” and the sweep of its beacon scanned a wide range. This is akin to the social scanning function of dreams, a capacity of our unconscious or dreaming mind to take into consideration a vast amount of information each day. Our understanding of dreams has been handicapped by its constriction within the

preventing accidents and injury.

I actually live not far from Brother’s lighthouse and, although I have never been on the island, I see it regularly when I cross a nearby bridge. Like most lighthouses, it has a foghorn, a sound that is at times sad, doleful, mournful, or soothing, like the lowing of cows in the distance; a sound that vibrates in many an ear, whether it registers or not. It strikes me that this is very sim-

ilar to the emotional effect dreams often have: we may not remember their content upon waking, but they leave a resonance, a trace as subtle as the echo of a foghorn across the waters. With this reverberation, the dreaming mind seems to remind us, “I am here.”

This modest image does not hint at the dynamism that sets the light in motion; another limitation is that it is a human-made structure, which dreaming is not. The mechanization of the lighthouse in modern times, making it possible to operate without humans in attendance and certainly no priests to tend a central fire, has a sad parallel in that dreams too suffer from modernization and are often bereft of a sacred venue in which we can hold and tend them. I am comforted by imagining priests seated at our brotherly lighthouse where dreams are created.

Having referred in this opening column to the holographic quality of dreams—their nondual mind—I will share in the next some research I’ve done on ways the dreaming mind does, in fact, give clues about whether its daily snapshots refer to the interior or exterior world. I close with a Machado poem that beautifully captures the theme I’ve addressed here:

<i>Is my soul asleep?</i>	<i>No, my mind is not asleep.</i>
<i>Have those beehives that labor at night stopped? And the water wheel of thought,</i>	<i>It is awake, wide awake.</i>
<i>is it dry, the cups empty,</i>	<i>It neither sleeps nor dreams but watches, its clear eyes open,</i>
<i>wheeling, carrying only shadows?</i>	<i>listening at the shores of the great silence.</i>